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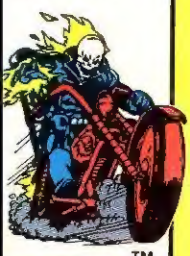

TM

GHOST RIDER™

FEATURING A STARTLING ALL-NEW RETELLING OF...THE ORIGIN OF THE GHOST RIDER!

THE TERRIBLE CURSE OF JONATHAN BLAZE!

BOB-JOE

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SCOTTIE in A Cracker Jack story
OKAY, SCOTTIE! THE SCORE IS TIED, BASES LOADED, AND TWO OUTS! GET IN THERE AND SHOW 'EM WHAT YOU'RE MADE OF.
COACH
I'LL DO MY BEST, COACH.
15 CRACKER JACKER
STRIKE ONE!
¡GULP! WHAT IF I STRIKE OUT?!?!
STRIKE TWO!
YOU CAN DO IT, SCOTTIE!
YOU'RE A CRACKER JACK.
ZOOM!
WHAP!
WHEN YOU'RE REALLY GOOD-THEY CALL YOU CRACKER JACK
CRACK HOME RUN
YOU DID IT, SCOTTIE.
WE WON THE PLAYOFFS!
WHAT A CRACKER JACK!
Cracker Jack
CANDIED POPCORN AND PEANUTS
Toy Surprise INSIDE
BORDEN
NET WT 4 OZ
Crunchy caramel-coated popcorn and peanuts and a secret toy surprise!

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THE RAINS OF SPRING HAVE COME!
THEY ARE TORRENTIAL, DRIVING RAINS--POUNDING DOWN UPON THIS LITTLE CHURCH, LOOSENING ITS SHINGLES AND RATTLING ITS WINDOWS!
IT IS AN AWFUL, LONELY STORM... CHILLING BOTH THE BODY AND THE SOUL... DRIVING ALL THE CREATURES OF THE EARTH BEFORE IT!
CREEEAK
EH? WHAT?
SOME WOULD SAY... IT'S THE DEVIL'S OWN WEATHER!
Stan Lee PRESENTS: GHOST RIDER...
THE CURSE OF JONATHAN BLAZE!
ROGER STERN WRITER
BOB BUDIANSKY PENCILER
JOSEF RUBINSTEIN INKER
DIANA ALBERS LETTERER
GEORGE ROUSSOS COLORIST
TOM DE FALCO EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER DEACON
W-WHO IS IT? WHO'S THERE?

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I SAID, WHO'S THERE? I CAN'T SEE YOU! WE'VE HAD A POWER FAILURE AND THE LIGHT IS BAD!
SORRY, FATHER--I DIDN'T MEAN TO STARTLE YOU. MY NAME'S JOHNNY BLAZE...
...AND I GUESS YOU COULD SAY I'M LOOKING FOR SANCTUARY.
I WAS OUT FOR A SPIN ON MY BIKE, WHEN THE STORM SURPRISED ME!
SANCTUARY? OH...O-OF COURSE, MY SON! COME IN! DRY YOURSELF OFF--
--AND I'LL GET US A LITTLE MORE LIGHT.
THANKS, FATHER! I APPRECIATE THIS!
SAY, IS THAT STUFF REAL GOLD? YOU MUST HAVE SOME VERY WELL-HEELED PARISHIONERS!
WHAT?! OH...UH... YES, WE DO.
BUT THE RICHES OF THE EARTH PALE BEFORE THOSE OF THE SPIRIT.
YOU SEEM TROUBLED, MY SON. MAY I... BE OF ANY HELP OR GUIDANCE TO YOU?
HELP? WELL... YEAH, MAYBE YOU CAN. I'VE GOT SOMETHING...AWFUL ...LOCKED UP INSIDE OF ME AND I HAVEN'T HAD ANYONE TO CONFIDE IN FOR A LONG TIME.
FATHER--I THINK I'D LIKE TO MAKE A CONFESSION!

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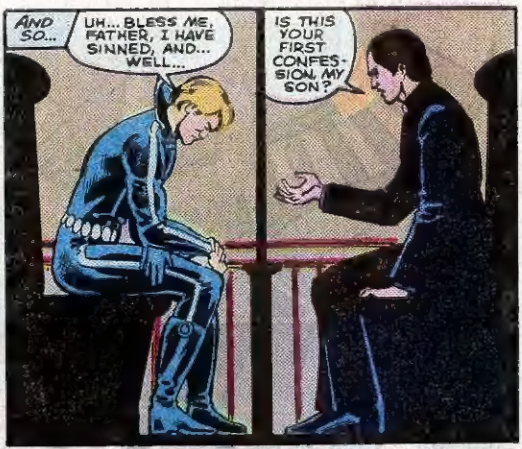
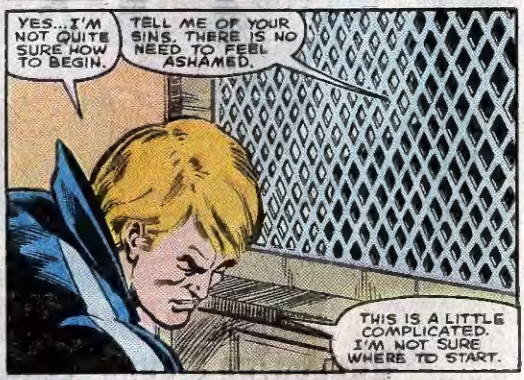
I REALIZE I'M NOT OF YOUR FAITH--NOT OF ANY FAITH, I'M AFRAID--BUT...
DON'T LET THAT WORRY YOU, MY SON.
THE CONFESSIONAL IS OPEN FOR ALL WHO HAVE NEED OF IT!
COME.




YES... I'M NOT QUITE SURE HOW TO BEGIN.
TELL ME OF YOUR SINS. THERE IS NO NEED TO FEEL ASHAMED.
THIS IS A LITTLE COMPLICATED. I'M NOT SURE WHERE TO START.

THEN JUST RELAX AND TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF. IN THAT WAY, THE SINS WILL REVEAL THEMSELVES... AND I WILL HELP YOU TO DEAL WITH THEM.
YOU WANT ME TO START AT THE BEGINNING?
IF IT MAKES YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE, YES.

ALL RIGHT, BUT I'M WARNING YOU... IT'S NOT A VERY PRETTY STORY.
MY FATHER WAS A MOTORCYCLE STUNT-RIDER... I NEVER KNEW MY MOTHER. DAD WAS A STAR PERFORMER WITH CRASH SIMPSON'S DAREDEVIL CYCLE SHOW. THE PROBLEM WAS...
3

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...HE DEFIED DEATH ONCE TOO OFTEN, AND LEFT ME AN ORPHAN..
THE DAY AFTER THE FUNERAL, CRASH AND HIS WIFE SAT ME DOWN FOR A LITTLE TALK...
YOUR FATHER WAS A BRAVE MAN, JOHNNY... WE'RE ALL GONNA MISS HIM. BUT RIGHT NOW, THE IMPORTANT ONE TO THINK ABOUT IS YOU!
YOU COULD GO TO AN ORPHANAGE. BUT, IF YOU LIKE, YOU CAN STAY WITH US! MONA, ROCKY, AND I'D BE PLEASED TO HAVE YOU AS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY-- ISN'T THAT RIGHT, ROCKY?
OH, YES, DADDY! PLEASE STAY WITH US, JOHNNY... PLEASE!
OKAY, ROXANNE... WHATEVER YOU SAY.
I WOULD HAVE DONE ALMOST ANYTHING FOR ROCKY SIMPSON.
"ANYWAY, I STAYED WITH THE CYCLE SHOW AT FIRST I WAS ON THE SIDE LINES. IT TOOK ME SOME TIME TO OVERCOME MY FEAR OF THE BIKES AFTER DAD'S DEATH.
"BUT I DID IT. BY THE TIME I WAS FIFTEEN, I WAS PRACTICING WITH ROCKY EVERY DAY... PREPARING FOR THE DAY WHEN I COULD BE AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE TEAM!
"BUT THEN, ONE DAY...
JOHNNY! THE BIKE'S ON FIRE!
JUMP, ROCKY... JUMP!

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"ROCKY EASILY TUMBLED TO SAFETY, BUT--MUCH AS I WANTED TO--I COULDN'T ABANDON THE BIKE.
"I HAD TO GET IT OUTSIDE BEFORE THE GAS TANK BLEW... OR ELSE THE TENT, THE STANDS, THE WHOLE SHOW WOULD GO UP IN FLAMES!
"BUT I WAS STILL AN INEXPERIENCED KID--AND MORE THAN JUST A LITTLE SCARED...
"I KEPT LOOKING BACK OVER MY SHOULDER TO SEE IF ROCKY WAS ALL RIGHT. I DIDN'T SEE THE TREE.
"BUT ROCKY'S MOTHER DID! SHE WAS ALREADY RUNNING AFTER ME..."
JOHNNY! JOHNNY, ARE YOU HURT?!
MONA--GET BACK! THE BIKE'S GONNA EXPLODE ANY SECOND!
"MY WARNING CAME TOO LATE!
WHOOMP

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"MONA SIMPSON NEVER HAD A CHANCE. THE DOCTORS SAID IT WAS A MIRACLE THAT SHE EVEN REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS.
JOHNNY... I MUST SPEAK TO... JOHNNY!
I'M HERE, MONA.
COME CLOSER... PLEASE.
JOHNNY... THE CYCLE GAME'S NO GOOD. TOO MUCH DEATH... TOO MUCH HURT.
I PROMISE... MOTHER.
MOTHER?
PROMISE ME... YOU'LL NEVER RIDE IN THE SHOW... PROMISE...
"MONA HAD BEEN LIKE A MOTHER TO ME. I'D ALWAYS WANTED TO TELL HER THAT. BUT DEATH CAME SO QUICKLY. I DON'T EVEN THINK SHE HEARD.
"IT WAS THE SECOND TIME I'D BURIED A LOVED ONE...AND IT WOULDN'T BE THE LAST. ROCKY TOOK MONA'S DEATH PRETTY HARD. SO DID CRASH, THOUGH HE WORKED HARD NOT TO SHOW IT.
"AND ME... I FELT LIKE A TOTAL LOUSE. OH, SURE, I GRIEVED OVER MONA! I LOVED THAT WOMAN, FATHER!
R.I.P.
"BUT EVEN AS WE KNELT THERE IN THE POURING RAIN-- ONE THOUGHT KEPT REPEATING OVER AND OVER IN MY HEAD 'YOU'LL NEVER RIDE A BIKE AGAIN, BLAZE! YOU GAVE YOUR WORD!'"
YOU SHOULDN'T BERATE YOURSELF, MY SON. MANY PEOPLE TURN INWARD TO ESCAPE THEIR GRIEF. IT ISN'T SELFISH...
...IT'S A VERY NATURAL REACTION!
JOHNNY?
MY SON? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
Y-YEAH... I'LL BE OKAY... IN A MINUTE, FATHER.
IT'S... JUST THAT IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE I'VE LET MYSELF THINK ABOUT MONA.

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THERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU JUST NEVER GET OVER.
BE OF GOOD FAITH, MY SON! AND TAKE HEART IN THE BELIEF THAT MONA HAS FOUND...
NO! DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT FAITH!
ANY FAITH I HAD, I LOST YEARS AGO!
A-ALL RIGHT, JOHNNY-- NO SERMONS. JUST RELAX AND CONTINUE WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE IT.
HAVE TO WATCH MY STEP... HE DOESN'T SEEM TOO STABLE.
SORRY, FATHER...
I DIDN'T MEAN TO JUMP DOWN YOUR THROAT.
IT'S JUST THAT MONA'S DEATH... DID SOMETHING TO ME. I WENT OFF IN ALL SORTS OF WEIRD DIRECTIONS.
I BEGAN TO TAKE A HEAVY INTEREST IN THE OCCULT...
DEMONOLOGY
...DON'T ASK ME WHY! MAYBE I HAD SOME CRAZY IDEA THAT I COULD FIND A WAY TO CONTACT MONA--I DON'T KNOW!
BUT 90% OF THE STUFF I READ WAS PURE BULL, AND THE REST WAS... DISGUSTING!
"I STOPPED READING THOSE BOOKS. WISH I'D THROWN THEM AWAY!
THROUGH IT ALL, THOUGH, I KEPT MY PROMISE TO MONA.
I STAYED WITH THE CYCLE SHOW-- EVEN BECAME CRASH'S TOP MECHANIC-- BUT I NEVER RODE.

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"IT GOT TO CRUSH AFTER AWHILE
"EVEN ROCKY STARTED TO
OH, JOHNNY... I CAN ONLY
--BUT I WAS TOO CAUGHT UP IN THE WHOLE MACHO TRIP... TRYING TO BE THE STRONG, SILENT TYPE, LIKE CRASH. IT WAS STUPID... REAL STUPID...
"ESPECIALLY SINCE I WAS DYING TO GET ON A BIKE AGAIN!
"THEN, ONE DAY IT HIT ME: I'D PROMISED NOT TO DO IT IN THE HOUSE. BUT HEDY MACK, I HAD ANYTHING ABOUT DOING IT FOR THE SHEER THRILL OF IT!
I'VE BEEN SECRETLY WATCHING YOU FOR MONTHS, JOHNNY. YOU'RE GOOD. MAYBE THE BEST! WHY ARE YOU HIDING YOUR TALENT THIS WAY? WHY?
"I COULDN'T HOLD IT IN ANY LONGER. NEITHER I TOLD ROCKY EVENTUALLY.
"I STARTED PRACTICING ON MY OWN LATE AT NIGHT
"BUT I WASN'T ON MY OWN FOR LONG!
"NOTHING MATTERED FOCAL THEN IN I COULD BE WITH BE MY BIKE AND BE HAPPY. AS LONG AS I HAD BIKES
"MEANWHILE, THE CYCLE SHOW GREW AND GREW.
BIKE WORLD
CRASH SIMPSON THRILLS
"WE WERE LIVIN' THE POPULARITY CANYON AND IT SEEMED LIKE WE'D NEVER COME DOWN.

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"AND THEN CAME THE DAY THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING."
HI, ALFIE! ANY NEWS ON THE BIG ONE...OR IS THIS ANOTHER SOCIAL CALL? YOU KNOW FOR A BOOK NO AGENT, YOU SURE--
WHAT?! YOU REALLY GOT IT?! YOU WOULDN'T PUT US ON? I'LL CALL YOU RIGHT BACK!
WE'VE DONE IT! ALFIE'S GOTTEN US INTO MADISON SQUARE GARDEN!
ALL RIGHT! THAT'S THE BIGGEST SHOWCASE ON THE EAST COAST! BIG TIME, HERE WE COME!
TODAY WE CELEBRATE!
CONGRATULATIONS, CRASH! THE SHOW HAS FINALLY HIT THE TOP!
YEAH... YOU'RE RIGHT.
BIG DEAL!
I'VE RISKED MY LIFE EVERY DAY FOR THIRTY YEARS, AND NOW, WHEN SUCCESS IS FINALLY WITHIN REACH
THE DOC TELLS ME I MAY NOT LIVE TO SEE IT.
THE LAB REPORTS CAME IN YESTERDAY. DOC WARREN GIVES ME A MONTH AT THE MOST.
I JUST WISH I HAD A SON I COULD TURN THE SHOW OVER TO.
HE JUST SAT THERE AND STARED AT ME. FATHER LOOKED LIKE HE WAS SOME SORT OF TRAITOR OR SOMETHING.
MR. SIMPSON'S NEWS MUST HAVE BEEN A TERRIBLE BLOW TO YOU.
A BLOW? IT WAS THE FINAL STRAW! WHEN CRASH WAS GONE, AND THERE WAS NOTHING ANYONE COULD DO... ANYONE EXCEPT ME!
SO, THAT NIGHT, I MADE A PACT WITH THE DEVIL!
WHAT?

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"DON'T BE SO SHOCKED FATHER IT WASN'T THE DEVIL YOU WARN K DS ABOUT IN SUNDAY SCHOOL -- THOUGH, AS FAR AS I WAS CONCERNED, HE MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN
"BUT I WAS WILLING TO PAY ANY PR CE TO SAVE CRASH SIMPSON.
EVEN IF THAT PR CE WAS MY SOUL!
APPEAR, PRINCE OF DARKNESS! YOUR HUMBLE SERVANT BECKENS!
THROUGH TIME ETERNAL, THROUGH ENDLESS S ACE, I BEG THEE... JOURNEY TO THIS PLACE.
"BEFORE I KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPEN NG HE WAS THERE!
FROM THE MYST C REALM OF HADES COME I TO A D THOSE WHO WOULD SERVE ME
Y YES! GRANT MY REQUEST... AND I WILL SERVE YOU FA THFULLY THROUGHOUT ETERN TY!
I ASK ONLY THAT CRASH SIMPSON BE SPARED FROM THE DISEASE WHICH IS KILLING HIM
IT IS DONE... AND YOUR SOUL IS MINE! BE WARNED, JONATHAN BLAZE... ONE DAY SOON, I WILL RETURN... TO COLLECT MY FEE!
"AND JUST L KE THAT HE WAS GONE! I FELT SOMEW CH TW STED INSIDE BUT I WAS CERTAIN THAT CRASH WOULD LIVE TO ENJOY THE SUCCESS HE D WORKED SO HARD FOR!

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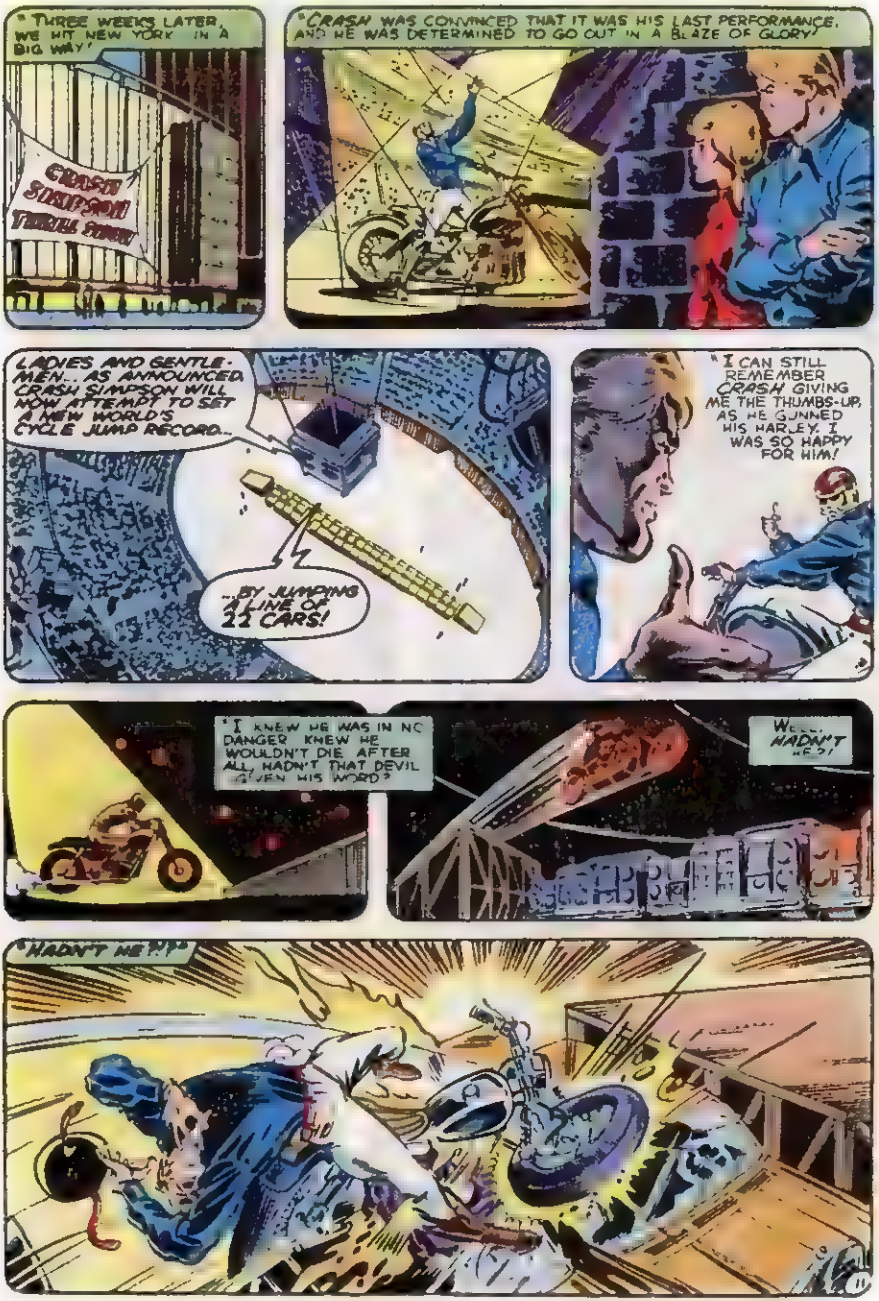
"THREE WEEKS LATER, WE HIT NEW YORK IN A BIG WAY!"
CRASH SIMPSON THRILL SHOW
"CRASH WAS CONVINCED THAT IT WAS HIS LAST PERFORMANCE, AND HE WAS DETERMINED TO GO OUT IN A BLAZE OF GLORY!"
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN... AS ANNOUNCED, CRASH SIMPSON WILL NOW ATTEMPT TO SET A NEW WORLD'S CYCLE JUMP RECORD...
...BY JUMPING A LINE OF 22 CARS!
"I CAN STILL REMEMBER CRASH GIVING ME THE THUMBS-UP, AS HE GUNNED HIS HARLEY. I WAS SO HAPPY FOR HIM!
"I KNEW HE WAS IN NO DANGER. KNEW HE WOULDN'T DIE. AFTER ALL, HADN'T THAT DEVIL GIVEN HIS WORD?
WELL... HADN'T HE?!
"HADN'T HE?!?"

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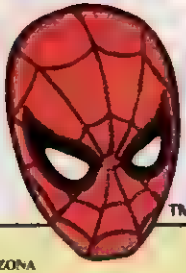

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"I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT! IT WAS ALL OVER SO FAST
"BY THE TIME WE GOT TO CRASH THERE WAS BARELY ENOUGH LEFT OF HIM TO LOAD ON A STRETCHER
"THE REST OF THAT DAY IS A BLUR TO ME. BY NIGHTFALL, I WAS ALL ALONE--TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT HAD GONE WRONG.
"THAT'S WHEN HE SHOWED UP.
YOU! YOU HAVE A LOT OF GALL, YOU DOUBLE CROSSING--!
SILENCE WEAKLING! I KEPT MY BARGAIN! THE MORTAL DID NOT DIE OF THE DISEASE! NOW, I CLAIM MY REWARD!
NO. NO!!
JOHNNY!
BACK, O FOUL DENIZEN OF THE DEPTHS! I COMMAND YOU--RELEASE THIS MAN! IN THE NAME OF ISHT... HOGO AGAM... BEGONE!
I DEPART, CURSED WOMAN! BUT ONE DAY, I SHALL CLAIM WHAT IS MINE!
"IT SEEMED THAT ROCKY HAD READ THOSE BOOKS OF MINE WHEN I WASN'T LOOKING... AND I DON'T KNOW WHERE I GOT THE RIGHT WORDS TO STOP THAT DEVIL THING!
"SHE SAVED ME... THAT NIGHT. AND I TOLD HER THAT I LOVED HER!
YA HEAR ME, FATHER? THAT LITTLE LADY SAVED MY SOUL! A-AND I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE SHE IS TONIGHT! I DON'T KNOW IF SHE'S ALIVE OR DEAD!
MAN, I REALLY DO A NUMBER ON THE PEOPLE I LOVE, DON'T I?
UH... JOHNNY... MY SON, YOU HAVE TO GET HOLD OF YOURSELF. I MEAN, THIS IS ALL VERY, VERY EXTRAORDINARY-- AND I'M SURE YOU SINCERELY BELIEVE THIS ALL HAPPENED TO YOU--
--BUT SURELY YOU MUST SEE THAT YOU'VE HARDLY COMMITTED ANY MAJOR SINS! THESE DELUSIONS OF DEVILS
12

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DELUSIONS? YOU THINK I'M CRAZY, FATHER?
WELL, I WISH I WAS CRAZY.. 'CAUSE NO SANE MAN SHOULD HAVE TO GO THROUGH THE TORTURES I DO!
ROCKY HAD SAVED MY SOUL...BUT NEITHER OF US KNEW THAT THE SUPERNATURAL SPOOK HAD LAID A CURSE ON ME, TOO! I FOUND OUT THE VERY NEXT NIGHT...
"BY THAT TIME, I'D BROKEN MY PROMISE TO MONA. I HAD TO. ROCKY COULDN'T RUN THE SHOW BY HERSELF. AND I WAS AS GOOD AS CASEY EVER WAS. IN FACT, I WAS BETTER!
"I WAS IN MY DRESSING ROOM WHEN IT HAPPENED. I WAS CHANGING OUT OF MY LEATHERS--
"--WHEN MY HEAD STARTED THROBBING. I FELT FEVERISH... DIZZY! AND THEN, AS I WATCHED IN HORROR, THE FIGURE IN THE MIRROR SUDDENLY CAUGHT FIRE!
"I COULD FEEL THE FLESH BEING SEARED FROM MY BONES. BEING CHANGED INTO SOMETHING DIFFERENT. SOMETHING AWFUL!
IN SECONDS, JOHNNY BLAZE WAS BURNED AWAY, AND A DEMON STOOD IN HIS PLACE... A DEMON WHICH MEN WOULD CALL THE GHOST RIDER!
"THAT DEVIL-CREATURE HAD TAKEN A DEMON FROM HIS INFERNAL DIMENSION AND-- SOMEHOW-- BONDED IT TO MY SOUL!
"AT FIRST I COULD CONTROL THE GHOST RIDER. BUT EVENTUALLY HE GOT STRONGER AND STRONGER. NOW WHEN I CHANGE, THERE'S NO STOPPING HIM! HE'S INCREDIBLY STRONG--
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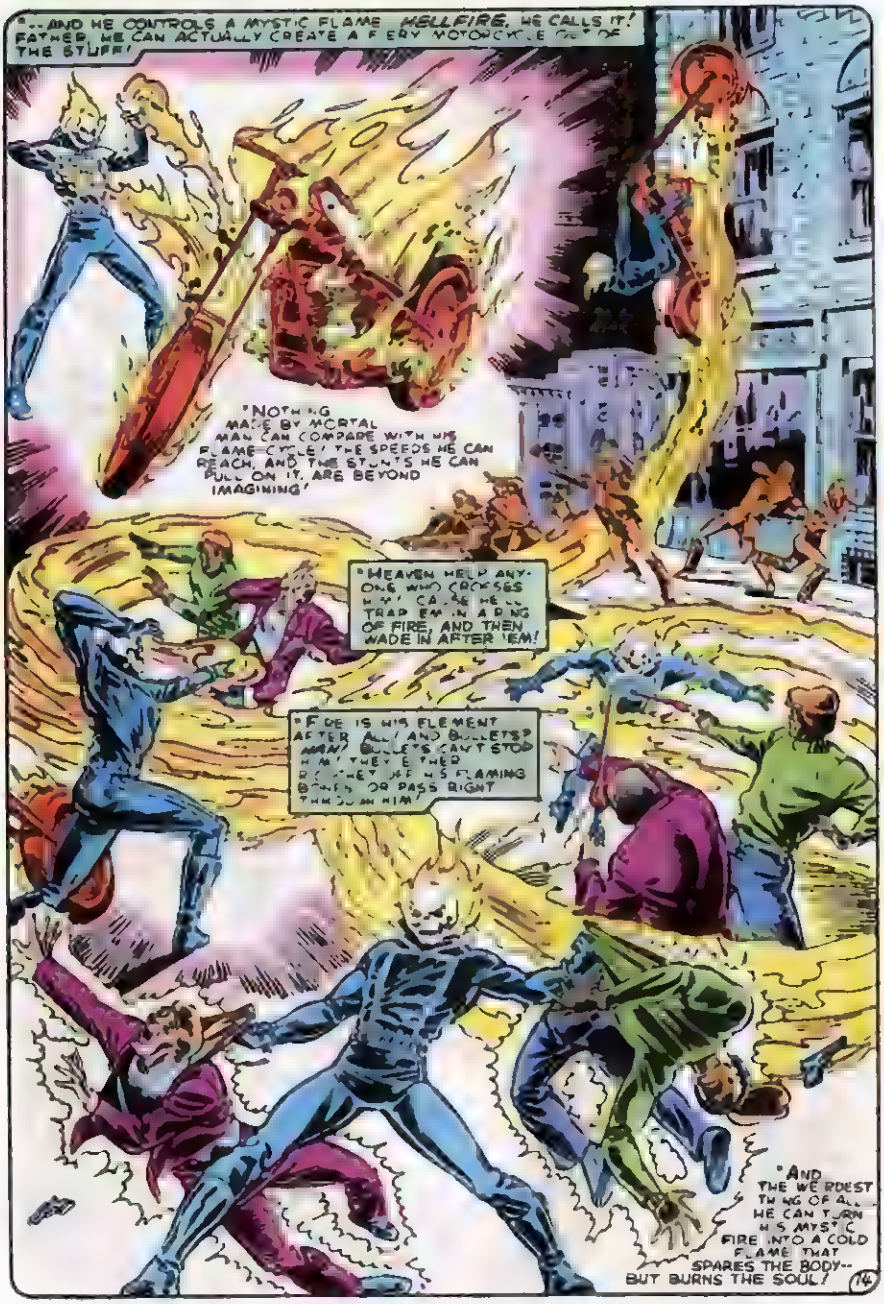
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14

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...AND THAT PUNISHMENT IS AWFUL TO WATCH!
ONCE HE'S SATISFIED HIS LUST FOR VENGEANCE, HE LETS ME HAVE MY BODY BACK. THEN, I HAVE DONE... WHAT I'VE LET HIM DO!
BUT SOMETIMES I FAIL
BUT WHAT BOTHERS ME THE MOST, FATHER, IS THAT SOMETIMES I WANT HIM TO GET OUT!
AH, WE... WE ALL HARBOR SUCH FEELINGS FROM TIME TO TIME, MY SON

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GHOST WRITERS!

c/o MARVEL COMICS GROUP
575 Madison Avenue
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TOM DeFALCO
EDITOR
MARK GRUENWALD
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Mr. DeFalco:

GHOST RIDER has always been one of my favorite *Marvel Comics* because of its perfect blend of the supernatural and the mundane. It's much more fun to watch the Brimstone Biker encounter regular humans, because they aren't as used to seeing demons as are the likes of, say, Azmodeus.

I really like the direction GHOST RIDER is currently taking. The thing I hated most about earlier issues was that Johnny Blaze was so much in control of the Ghost Rider that they talked alike. It really detracted from the spookiness of the Ghost Rider when he'd say something like, "Good gravy!" But things have really been rolling of late!

The cover to this issue — GHOST RIDER #64 — shows that Brent Anderson's artistic talents aren't limited to the confines of KA-ZAR THE SAVAGE (another great *Marvel Comic*, by the way!). Nice job, Brent!

This issue's letters page featured a request from Steve Swaby for more appearances of the new Night Rider. I couldn't agree more!

Dave Schmidt
1134 Senator Street
Brooklyn, NY 11220

More of the Night Rider? Okay, we'll take it under advisement, Dave.

Dear Tom,

The Ghost Rider has been my favorite character for a long time, and I'm troubled by the stories of the past year. Prior to this, the stories — circa '79-'80 — were very good. Not only was the power and persona of the demon developed to a frightening degree, but there was also a focus on the total loneliness of Johnny Blaze's life. As for the art, well, I could spend a whole page praising Don Perlin. Suffice it to say that when the Fleisher/Perlin team reached its apex with GHOST RIDER #50 last year, the book could have been placed in the ranks of *Marvel*'s top five titles without a single thought. This is no longer true, and it's not simply because DAREDEVIL and the FANTASTIC FOUR have become so good.

My first complaint is a simple one. Don Perlin hasn't handled the complete art since issue #55, and — in my eyes — the book has suffered for it. (The McDonnell/Trapani art in GR #63 and Sutton's inks in this issue — #64 — have been quite praiseworthy, though!) Don has done a good job on the DEFENDERS, but a book like GHOST RIDER is his forte. If Don is unavailable, you should try to find a regular artist who can create the necessary atmosphere for the strip.

However, the main problem with GHOST RIDER is an unfortunate sameness to the plotting of late. There's usually a villain with a "flawless" plan for defeating the Ghost Rider... and GR ultimately attacks and defeats this enemy with ease, through sheer power. The demon, let me point out, does not win his battles through any sort of strategy or twist of fate... he just inexplicably escapes certain destruction. GR should not have recovered so quickly from the Orb's eye-missiles last issue, and he should not have so simply broken free from the bonds of Azmodeus this issue without better explanation. It's a cheap out.

If readers know from previous issues that a sudden surge of power will lead the Ghost Rider to a gloating victory, he'll never seem to be in serious danger. This issue was a perfect case in point. Azmodeus is supposedly a "Lord of the Netherworld," yet Ghost Rider turns out to be (apparently) more powerful. Where's the suspense in that? I'm not saying that you've made the Ghost Rider too strong, but you have been undercutting the powers and credibilities of his foes. Only the Apparition and Joshua posed any kind of believable threats during the past year, and the latter character was in a story which bore an annoying similarity to GR #26's encounter with Dr. Druid.

Then, there's the continuing subplot of Blaze's lack of control over the demon. It's continued without progress for too long.

Further suggestions: Keep the Quentin Carnival/Cynthia Randolph storyline. Blaze hasn't had a real supporting cast for nearly forty issues. At the very least, it's an interesting change of pace. Dump losers like Moondark and the Water Wizard. Make better use of the Orb. He's been reduced from GR's arch-(mortal)-foe to an ineffective bungler. He has the potential for greatness. I enjoyed the stories which focused on the way Blaze's curse affected himself and others; they were unusual. The past year's stories, however, have concentrated on nothing but super-villain battles, losing a lot of the earlier subtleties. Try to capture that flavor again, and don't be afraid to take risks with unusual issues like "The Demon Within!" (GR #47).

Thanks for taking the time to read this letter.

Ken Hart
540 Lincoln Avenue
Staten Island, NY 10306

No, Ken... thank you for taking the time to write and send it! We're always interested in reading well-thought-out, constructively critical letters. If it weren't for letters like yours, we'd never have a clue as to what you didn't like, or as to how we might improve.

At any rate, there are changes in the winds. And now, we'd like to introduce you to one of those changes...

CONFESSIONS OF A GHOST WRITER

I never expected to be here. Really.

After all, despite the fact that I've been writing DOCTOR STRANGE for the past year, I was never really into the more horrifying aspects of the supernatural. Oh, sure, I like to read 'em — give me a good book by Saki or Stephen King, and you won't hear anything out of me for hours. I never, ever expected to be *writing* the stuff. But I am.

You see, it happened like this.

It was a dreary Tuesday afternoon. I was seated in the aft chair of Tom DeFalco's office, concocting a plot for the next issue of the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN. Tom was giving his usual sterling appraisal of my ideas, but I could see that his mind was preoccupied. For one thing, he kept staring at the comic covers on his wall. And for another, he kept trying to light his stogie, but had so far only succeeded in singeing half of his moustache.

Tom," I said, "Is something wrong?"

"Yeah, I need to find a new writer for the Ghost Rider's comic," he replied, putting out the smoldering remains of his upper lip.

"Really? Gee, that shouldn't be too hard. I know that the ol' brimstone biker can be a bit of a bothead, but his series has a lot of untapped potential for a writer. . limitless possibilities, if ya know what I mean."

"I know exactly what you mean!" chuckled Tom, lobbing a sourball in my direction. "Put up or shut up!"

Beg pardon?" I rasped, choking on the sourball.

"You have some time in your schedule — come up with a plot!"

"Yeah!" chimed in Mark Gruenwald from behind a pile of WHAT IF? pages. "I dare ya. . I double-dare ya!"

Knowing I'd been had, I slunk off and in that time-honored writers' tradition — namely, staring off into space — I began to ponder all that I had heard of the curse of Jonathan Blaze. Well, it didn't take long for me to realize that I had my first title. The basis of the story evolved over the next few hours. I accosted Tom in the hall, hit him with my premise .. he liked it. . we did it... here it is. (See how easy it is, once the plot's out of the way?)

And here I am.

Like I said, I never expected to be here. But, ya know, I'm glad I am! Ol' Johnny Blaze is one of the most intriguing gents about whom I've ever written . and that's no lie! I look forward to a long and exciting run.

I hope you'll come along for the ride.

--Roger Stern
11/12/84

"Heh-heh" Poor Roger doesn't know what he's let himself in for. Next month, you'll meet Brimstone Bob Budlansky — whose pulsating pencils will be gracing these pages — and, you'll thrill to a truly terrifying tale of... *"Personal Demons!"*

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WHAT HAVE I GOTTEN MYSELF INTO? I SHOULD HAVE BEEN OUT OF HERE BY NOW! I'M NOT PREPARED TO DEAL WITH A LUNATIC!
FATHER? YOU STILL THERE?
YES, MY SON. GO ON WITH YOUR ...CONFESSION
THERE'S NOT MUCH MORE LEFT TO TELL. EXCEPT WE TONIGHT I WAS HEADED INTO TOWN BY A BACK COUNTRY ROAD -
--WHEN I CAME ACROSS A MAN LYING IN A DITCH... A MAN WHO HAD BEEN LEFT FOR DEAD.
THE MAN WAS A PRIEST "FATHER"!
BEFORE HE DIED, HE TOLD ME HOW HIS MURDERER HAD WAYLAID HIM AND STOLEN HIS BELONGINGS. THAT LAST PART PUZZLED ME.
...BUT I SAW ALL THE BLOOD IN THIS PLACE. QUITE A MAUL, ISN'T IT?
ANYWAY, AS I'M THAT POOR LOAD IN MY ARMS
--I KNEW WHAT I HAD TO DO!
6

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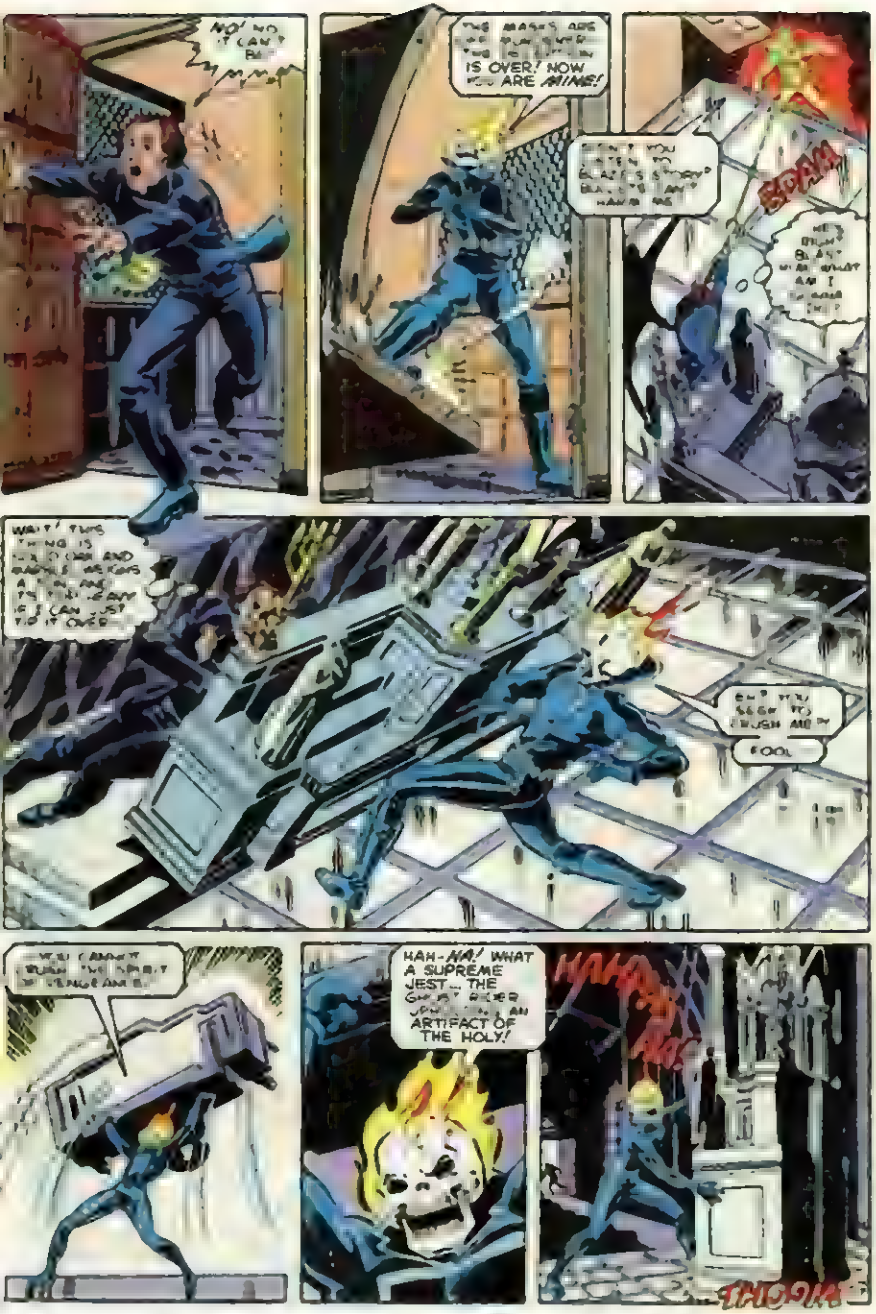
NO! NO, IT CAN'T BE!
IS OVER! NOW YOU ARE MINE!
KRAKK
WAIT! THIS THING IS ALIVE! HEH AND RAPHAEL ARE FOR A REAL, AND IT'S HEAVY IF I CAN JUST TIP IT OVER—
AND YOU NEED TO LAUGH MORE
FOOL
HAH-HA! WHAT A SUPREME JEST... THE GHOST RIDER IS AN ARTIFACT OF THE HOLY!
HAHAHA HA!
THUDDA

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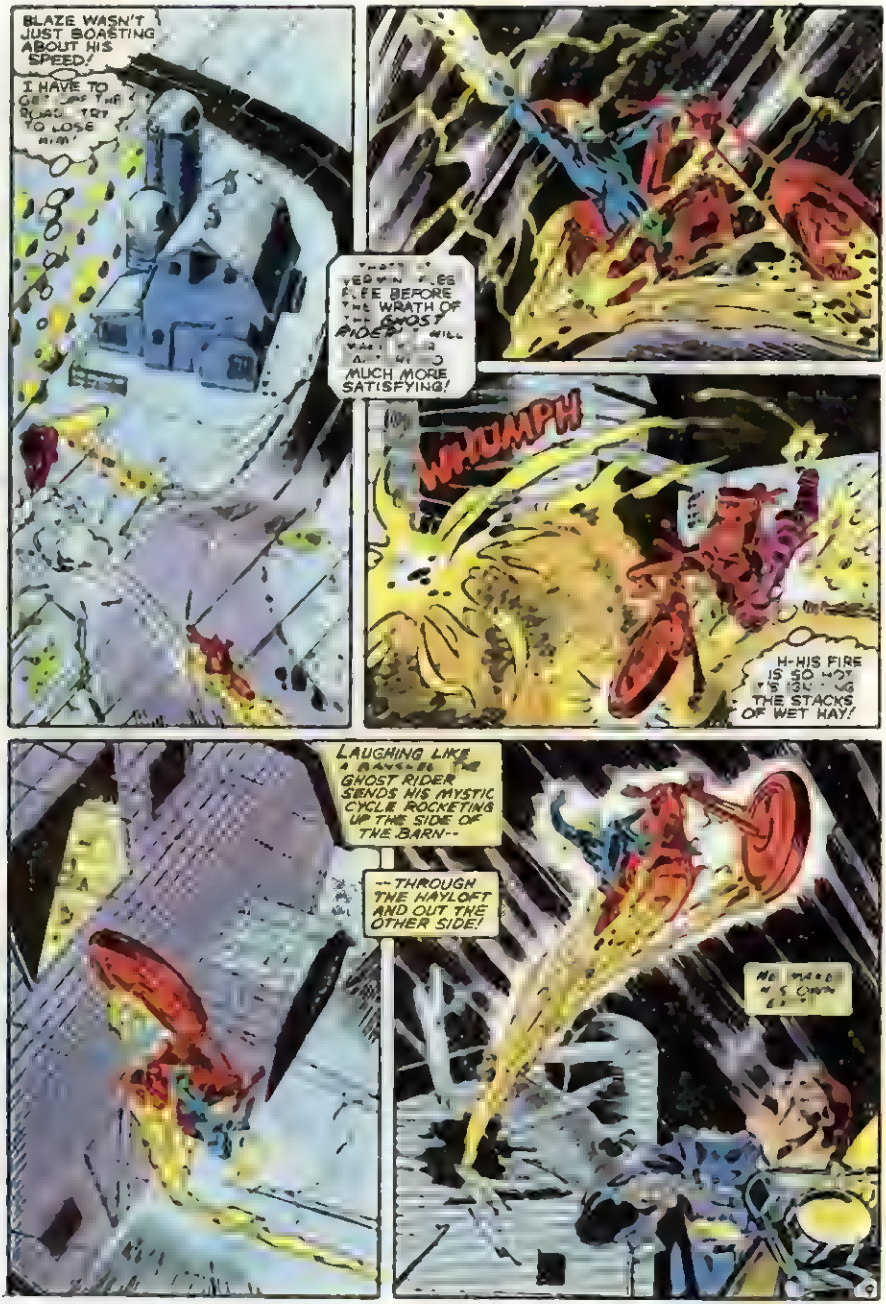
BLAZE WASN'T JUST BOASTING ABOUT HIS SPEED!
I HAVE TO GET AWAY FROM HERE! TRY TO LOSE HIM!
MUCH MORE SATISFYING!
WHUMPH
H-HIS FIRE IS SO HOT IT'S IGNITING THE STACKS OF WET HAY!
LAUGHING LIKE A MANIAC, GHOST RIDER SENDS HIS MYSTIC CYCLE ROCKETING UP THE SIDE OF THE BARN--
--THROUGH THE HAYLOFT AND OUT THE OTHER SIDE!

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PULLING BACK ON THE ROADWAY SO SOON, MURDERER? WHAT'S THE MATTER--
--DON'T YOU ENJOY BIKING CROSS-COUNTRY
HA HA HA!
GOOD GOD IN HEAVEN! ANYTHING SLOW HIM DOWN?
CIRCLES AROUND ME!
YOU SHOULD SEE YOUR FACE, MORTAL! I DO BELIEVE YOU'RE FRIGHTENED!
HA HA HA HA HA
THAT OVERPASS UP AHEAD! I CAN JUST GLIMPSE IT BEFORE HE SEES IT--!
SHOOTS AHEAD, AND...
YOU'LL FIND NO ROAD TO FREEDOM THIS WAY!
FIRE! GOTTA TRY TO GO AROUND IT!
EMBANKMENT, THE FLEEING MURDERER LOSES CONTROL OF THE MOTORCYCLE AT THE VERY EDGE OF A RAILWAY SWITCHING YARD!
NO!

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BULLPEN BULLETINS

ENTER AND SIGN IN PLEASE!

Hello, I'm Jim Shooter, and my line is Editor-in-Chief-ing the Mighty Marvel Comics Group. It's a good job, but in order to support my four-hundred and six-teen pet Gila Monsters I moonlight as an aluminum siding salesman. Anyway welcome once again, to the Bullpen Page, where each and every month I do my best to entertain and enlighten you.

THE FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS...

...is to fulfill a promise I made last month, namely to explain exactly what the word "Bullpen," as in "Marvel Bullpen," means. It seems that a lot of folks don't know! Well-I-I, in the old days, you see, virtually every comics company had a big room where all the artists and writers sat together, creating their works of four-color wonder. Creative folks generally being the garrulous sort, typically, quite a bit of "bull" got tossed around those legendary rooms, so the nickname "bullpen" was a natural. It was borrowed from baseball, of course, from the area where relief pitchers wait to be called into the game. Where baseball got the name, I don't know - maybe from bullfighting arenas, from the place they keep the bulls until it's their turn. Who knows? Noah Webster I'm not. At any rate, these days, most comics artists and writers prefer to work in their own studios, but, still, here at Marvel, we have a big room, a production bullpen, where all of our art/production people work doing our paste-ups, lettering corrections, art corrections and such — and even though the editorial folks are bunched in small offices off to the sides we still refer to the whole shebang as the *Marvel Bullpen*. It's a tradition dating back to the days when we actually were a one-room operation!

FAMOUS VISITORS DEPT.

As everyone knows, the world's favorite mini-master of mayhem, *Dennis the Menace* has been wreaking havoc in his own Marvel Comic since last summer — therefore, it was inevitable that Dennis's creator, a true giant in the funnies biz, the world famous Hank Ketcham would eventually visit the Bullpen. Hank talked for a while with me and Publishing Vice President Mike Hobson about our plans for the terrible tyke, and then met with Assistant Editor Ann Nocenti and Editor Tom DeFalco, who handle the editorial duties for the Dennis the Menace monthly comic and our new Dennis the Menace digests, respectively. Though Hank and the folks at his studio out in California produce all the Dennis material we publish, there are still production chores, proofreading and other details to be handled at our end, so careful coordination of effort is essential. Thanks to Hank's visit, we're now more coordinated than ever.

After the work was done, we spent a pleasant hour or so just shooting the breeze with Hank, who's a terrific person as well as a superstar cartoonist. One thing puzzles me though — how can Dennis be such a monster when his "Dad" is such a nice guy?

WHAT? ANOTHER ONE?

Yes, yet another superstar world-class, all-pro cartoonist happened by this Crazy piece late one afternoon recently. Sergio Aragonés, most famous for the wonderful work he's done for *MAD Magazine* over the years, stopped in to say *buenos tardes* to all of us at Marvel while he was in town on other business. It just so happened that three of our own superstars, namely John Byrne, Frank Miller, and Roger Stern were also in the office just then, and sensing a rare opportunity, I quickly organized a dinner excursion OK we went to *D'Angelo's*, a cozy classy restaurant on West 56th Street where we were joined by John's beautiful wife Andrea and Frank's girlfriend, lovely Laurie Sutton. Sergio had other plans and couldn't stay for dinner, unfortunately, but he sat with us for about an hour and a half, regaling us with tales of the early days of his career when he was just breaking into the business. After Sergio left, we proceeded to stuff ourselves with the best Italian food we'd ever eaten and talk about how true it is that, for us, these are the good old days — and the days on the horizon look better still. Is there anything better in life than feeling good about yourself, your work and having a wonderful evening with good friends? (Especially when the company's picking up the tab!)

AND ON THAT NOTE...

...I'm afraid I've got to close for this month. After all, it's just about feeding time for my four-hundred and sixteen — whoops! Make that five-hundred and thirty seven pet Gila Monsters! Darn, but those things breed fast! And they get so irate when I'm late with their dinner!

Anybody want to buy some aluminum siding? How about some Gila Monsters?

Oh, Well

Jim Shooter

Just before press time we were advised that Wally Wood, one of the all-time greats of our profession, had passed away. The following, written by Larry Hama, who probably knew Woody best of all of us here at Marvel, sums up our feelings:

> The comics world lost one of it's greatest visionaries last month with the untimely passing of Wally Wood. His work was historical and terrifying, action packed but masterfully planned and executed. His artistic maturity matched his genius and his wonder in true colors for a time and the world will never see the likes of him again.
>
> Woody had a wonderful enthusiasm and genuinely generous nature. I stopped in a hobby shop one spring and lost my self in the comics that day, at the hands of all who dare to defy the strictures of Never Never Land.
>
> Hopefully there is a sylvan glade somewhere where there, silver age comics gods warmly meet fossil fantasized aliens who live behind boulders muttering "oga boh" and a cute little pterodactyl hobby with the nicest pinky sheath ladies for an endless afternoon.
>
> Larry Hama

THE MIGHTY MARVEL CHECKLIST

- ☐ MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #97 — The Thing and Ant-Man
- ☐ KING CONAN #10 — Now bi-monthly!
- ☐ DAZZLER #16
- ☐ KA-ZAR #14
- ☐ DEMONS, THE MENACE #7
- ☐ DAREDEVIL #183
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- ☐ CAPTAIN AMERICA #289
- ☐ THOR #310
- ☐ MICRONAUTS #41
- ☐ GHOST RIDER #80
- ☐ MOON KNIGHT #10
- ☐ INCREDIBLE HULK #271
- ☐ AVENGERS #210
- ☐ CONAN #134
- ☐ MARVEL TALES #138 — Reprinting Amazing Spider-Man #21
- ☐ X-MEN #157
- ☐ IRON MAN #33
- ☐ POWER MAN IRON FIST #81
- ☐ FANTASTIC FOUR #242
- ☐ MARVEL TEAM-UP #117 — Spider-Man and the X-MEN's Wolverine!
- ☐ IRON MAN #150
- ☐ PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN #76
- ☐ DEFENDERS #107 — Death claims two Defenders!
- ☐ STAR WARS #80
- ☐ MASTER OF KUNG FU #112
- ☐ TEAM AMERICA #1

MARVEL MAGAZINES

- ☐ EPIC ILLUSTRATED #11 — Featuring *Made the She-Wolf* by CHRIS CLAREMONT and JOHN BOLTON, *Wolverine* by DOUG MOENCH, JOHN BUSCEMA, MARIE SEVERIN and STEVE OLIFF, and more for our fantasy fans.
- ☐ CRAZY #86 — A giant-sized *Crazy Super Special* featuring 80% new material and 20% classic reprints from the past.
- ☐ SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #75
- ☐ MARVEL FANFARE #2 — The second issue of Marvel's very special new magazine.

THE HYPE BOX

This month, as in the absolute b-

TEAM AMERICA #1 — Jim SHOOTER and Mike VOSBURG collaborate to bring you some really gritty, on-going adventures of a wild new collection of heroes, con-tinuously. Team America: Do the theme's a pretty neat stuff. Give it a shot!

KING CONAN #10 — Because you will can't get enough of Robert E. Howard's greatest creation, the King is now bi-monthly! In case you haven't seen it yet, KING CONAN is a slightly different Conan better more regal but no less fierce and gutsy than he was as a youngster. DOUG MOENCH wrote it and ERNIE CHAN did the art. And they did a nice job of it, too.

MARVEL FANFARE #2 — We mentioned that issue up more in editor AL MILGROM having a fill the whole big over a later comments printed and on this mag. He cares about it. A lot. He and the rest of us here at Marvel feel it's something real special an edition comic magazine printed on glossy high quality paper. What it means is that if you haven't got quality material to fill it, but you have with it, like AL and MILT and MICHAEL GOLDEN's *Spider-Man Angel Ka-Zar* team-up, and a Master Fantastic solo adventure by ROGER MCKENZIE THE HOR VON LEIDEN and ARMANDO GIL — we're not worried.

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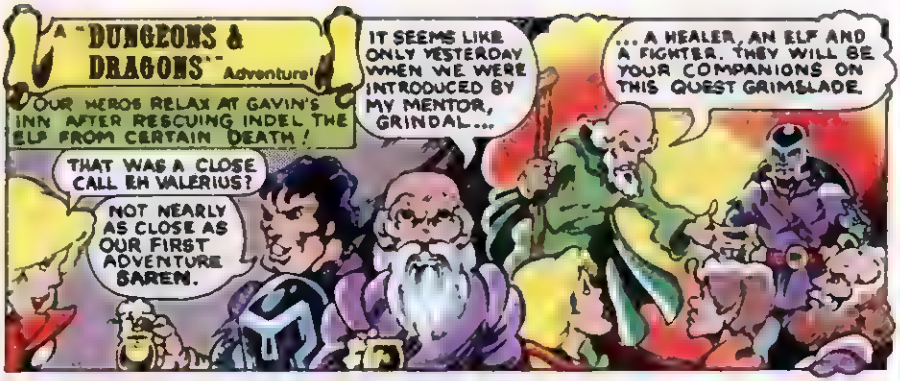
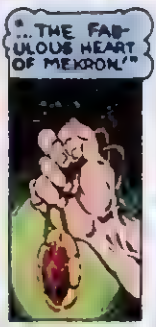
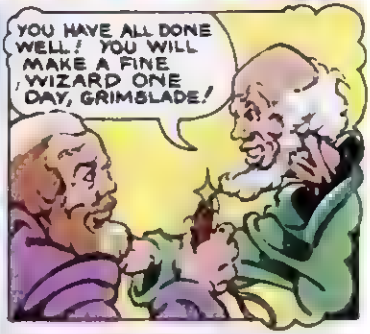
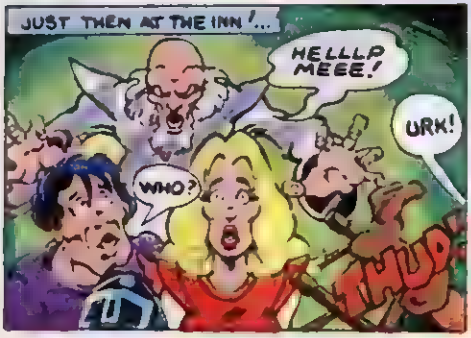

A "DUNGEONS & DRAGONS" Adventure!
OUR HEROS RELAX AT GAVIN'S INN AFTER RESCUING INDEL THE ELF FROM CERTAIN DEATH!
THAT WAS A CLOSE CALL EH VALERIUS?
NOT NEARLY AS CLOSE AS OUR FIRST ADVENTURE BAREN.
IT SEEMS LIKE ONLY YESTERDAY WHEN WE WERE INTRODUCED BY MY MENTOR, GRINDAL...
... A HEALER, AN ELF AND A FIGHTER. THEY WILL BE YOUR COMPANIONS ON THIS QUEST GRIMSLADE.







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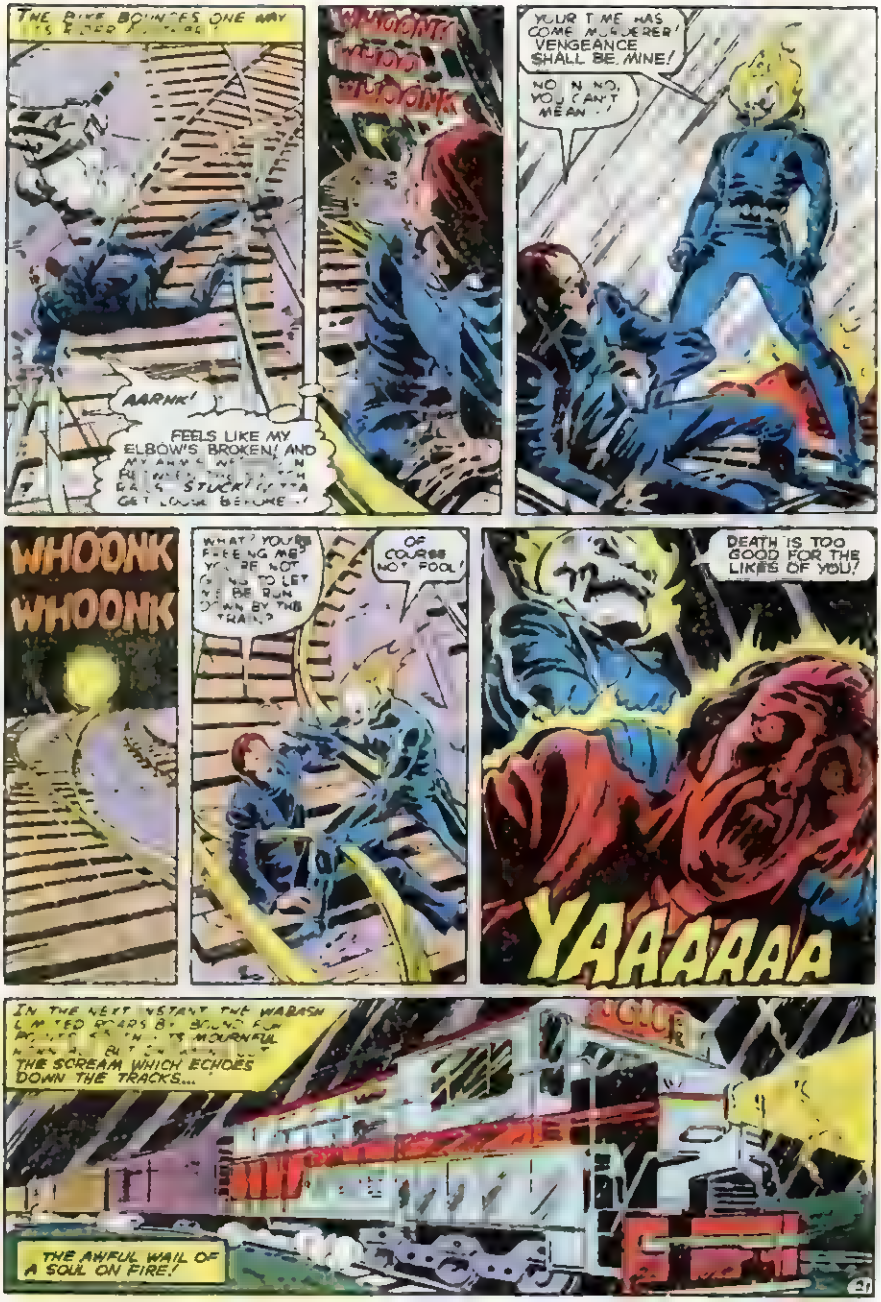
THE BIKE BOUNCES ONE WAY
AARNK!
FEELS LIKE MY ELBOW'S BROKEN! AND
WHOONK
WHOONK
YOUR TIME HAS COME, MURDERER! VENGEANCE SHALL BE MINE!
NO, N-NO, YOU CAN'T MEAN...!
WHOONK
WHOONK
WHAT? YOU'RE FREEING ME? YOU'RE NOT GOING TO LET ME BE RUN DOWN BY THE TRAIN?
OF COURSE NOT, FOOL!
DEATH IS TOO GOOD FOR THE LIKES OF YOU!
YAAAAAA
IN THE NEXT INSTANT THE WABASH LIMITED ROARS BY, BOUND FOR PARTS UNKNOWN, ITS MOURNFUL WHISTLE BLOWING...
THE SCREAM WHICH ECHOES DOWN THE TRACKS...
THE AWFUL WAIL OF A SOUL ON FIRE!

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DAWN, SEVERAL HOURS LATER...
TAKE IT EASY, BOYS! THERE'S A LOT MORE WRONG WITH THIS FELLA THAN JUST A BROKEN ELBOW!
WHAT ON EARTH HAPPENED TO THIS GUY?
HIS MOUTH'S OPEN AS IF HE WERE TRYING TO SCREAM... BUT HAD RUN OUT OF SOUND!
AND THAT LOOK ON HIS FACE! THAT'S THE LOOK OF A MAN WHO'S STARED RIGHT DOWN INTO HELL!
DARNEST THING I EVER SAW! YA SAY YOU FOUND HIM THAT WAY?
THAT'S RIGHT, SERGEANT! SOMEONE HAD STOLEN MY BIKE AND LEFT A PRETTY CLEAR TRAIL. WHEN I FOLLOWED IT TO THE END, I FOUND HIM! HE ISN'T A REAL PRIEST, IS HE?
NAW... BUT SOMETHING SURE PUT THE FEAR OF GOD INTO HIM, MISTER...
...SORRY, BUT I FORGOT YOUR NAME.
BLAZE, SIR. JOHNNY BLAZE. I'M WORKING WITH A CARNIVAL IN THE NEXT TOWNSHIP.
DIDN'T YOU USED TO RIDE THE CYCLE CIRCUIT?
I... USED TO.
I THOUGHT I'D SEEN YOUR FACE BEFORE. NORMALLY, I'D HOLD YOU FOR QUESTIONING--
--BUT WE JUST GOT WORD FROM THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE THAT THIS FELLA'S WANTED FOR A STRING OF THEFTS. AND LAST NIGHT HE EVIDENTLY KILLED A REAL PRIEST AND TORE UP A CHURCH!
CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? WHAT WOULD POSSESS A MAN TO DO A THING LIKE THAT?
WHO CAN SAY, SERGEANT? GREED? HATE? FEAR? A MAN CAN HAVE A LOT OF DEMONS LOCKED UP INSIDE OF HIM!
AND WHEN THAT HAPPENS... HEAVEN HELP US ALL!
END

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